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ABSTRACT

Knowing what type of information is appropriate for particular purposes, knowing how to find such information easily, and evaluating information may be called information literacy, digital literacy, media literacy, or techno-literacy. Educators should feel comfortable searching and critically evaluating information found on the Internet before trying to teach these important skills to students. Educators can practice critical evaluation of Internet sources by conducting searches on topics with which they are familiar. Search strategies should include keyword list formulation and Boolean combinations. Using one of the evaluation checklists reviewed in this digest, teachers should be able to evaluate sites critically, and to examine the technical aspects of the site, the authority of the writer, and the validity of the writer's content. At the end of the evaluation, teachers should ask the following questions: whether the site provides the information they need to solve their information problem; and if it does not, how the process could be varied to obtain the needed results. Self-assessment at the end of the information seeking process is a higher-order thinking skill that students and teachers should understand and apply. Critical evaluation of information can be applied to all information sources including World Wide Web sites. This ERIC digest lists what are the important aspects of evaluation for educators; and what are the important aspects of teaching Web site evaluation to students. Includes an annotated bibliography of evaluation checklists. (JMK)

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Evaluation of World Wide Web Sites: An Annotated Bibliography

by Kathleen Schrock

Knowing what type of information is appropriate for particular purposes, knowing how to find such information easily, and evaluating information, may be called information literacy, digital literacy, media literacy, or techno-literacy. Paul Gilster best defines the concept in his book, *Digital Literacy*:

Digital literacy is the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide range of sources when it is presented via computers... (Not) only must you acquire the skill of finding things, you must also acquire the ability to use those things in your life. Acquiring digital literacy for Internet use involves mastering a set of core competencies. The most essential of these is the ability to make informed judgments about what you find on-line. (Gilster, 1997)

Educators should feel comfortable searching and critically evaluating information found on the Internet before trying to teach these important skills to students. One of the best ways educators can practice critical evaluation of Internet sources is by conducting searches on topics with which they are familiar. Search strategies, including keyword list formulation and Boolean combinations, should come easily because the educators will have expertise in the chosen topic areas. Using one of the evaluation checklists reviewed below, teachers should be able to evaluate sites critically, examine the technical aspects of the site, the authority of the writer, and the validity of the writer's content. At the end of the evaluation, when the entire process is completed, teachers should ask themselves whether the site provides the information they need to solve their information problem. If it did not, they should ask themselves how the process could be varied to obtain the needed results. Self-assessment at the end of the information seeking process is a higher-order thinking skill that students and teachers should understand and apply. Critical evaluation of information can be applied to all information sources including World Wide Web sites.

What are the important aspects of evaluation for educators?

EJ 524 769

D. Scott Brandt. Evaluating information on the Internet. *Computers in Libraries*. May 1996. In the context of describing the components of a bibliographic instruction course at the Purdue University Libraries, this article deals with the adaptation of traditional print evaluation techniques to the Internet environment. One intriguing part of the article includes a discussion of the relationship between searching for information, the evaluation of sources, and the lack of correlation between the two.

EJ 536 202

Tate, Marsha and Jan Alexander. Teaching critical evaluation skills for World Wide Web resources. *Computers In Libraries*. Nov/Dec 1996. Tate and Alexander's article presents a college level biblio-

graphic instruction lesson plan dealing with the evaluation of Web sites. The article also outlines the concept of evaluating different types of Web pages with differing sets of criteria. Criteria and examples are given for an advocacy page, a business/marketing page, an informational page, a news page, and a marketing page. More of their work may be found on the web at <http://www.widener.edu/> following the Library link.

EJ 544 697

Everhart, Nancy. Web page evaluation: Views from the field. *Technology Connection*. May/June 1997, p. 24-26. In an article targeted towards school library media specialists and their use of the Internet to support curriculum, Everhart outlines nine categories one should become familiar with when evaluating Web sites. She draws her criteria from other evaluation sources on the Internet, some of which are discussed in the article, and discusses evaluation from a school-based perspective (i.e. "Information is presented in short enough segments so it can be printed out without backing up the system for other users.")

EJ 543 163

Symons, Ann K. Sizing up sites: How to judge what you find on the web. *School Library Journal*. April, 1997, p. 22-25. Using a common sense approach, Symons offers some practical tips to help librarians find Internet sites that are worthwhile. She suggests looking at the home pages of other schools and libraries to see what other teaching professionals have found worthy of adding to their sites. This article also includes criteria for evaluation of sites, and suggests librarians rate some sites and share the results of these ratings with other professionals via the Web and professional journals.

ED 408 990

Clark, Barbara I., et.al. *Creating web pages: Is anyone considering visual literacy?* January 1997. Concentrating on a narrow area of the evaluation of Web pages, this article contains information dealing with the examination of the design, graphics, text aesthetics, and functionality of Web pages. The authors contend that visual design should be an important factor in the development of Web pages. They present the findings of a survey of both commercial and K-12 sites, and list recommended standards for the design of Web pages. This area of evaluation is important for one to consider when choosing a site to support the curriculum, as well as when designing new Web pages.

ED 390 416

Heidman, Kelly R. *A Delphi study to ascertain evaluation guidelines for business resources on the Internet*. March 1995. This study includes the results of a survey given to Internet users to ascertain why certain Internet pages were chosen to be used in-

stead of others. The two-page survey, if updated to reflect current Internet tools, could be a useful pre- and post assessment instrument for high school students to complete to compare the usefulness of both print and non-print sources, and to compare free Internet services versus subscription services.

ED 409 020

Wyman, Steven, et.al. *User and system-based quality criteria for evaluating information resources and services available from federal websites: Final report*. June 1997. Although targeted towards the evaluation of Federal Web sites, the multiple instruments used to rate the presentation, content, technical, and policy issues of these sites is easily adaptable to other types of sites. The inclusion of a lengthy bibliography, as well as results of focus group discussions, leads the reader to understand the importance of systematic evaluation and assessment of Internet information.

What are the important aspects of teaching Web site evaluation to students?

When students learn to evaluate information on the Internet to determine whether the resources available online meet their needs, they should be reminded that traditional print or offline material may meet their requirements in ways Internet resources may not. They should realize what the Internet is not, in order to realize what it can offer them.

Teaching critical evaluation of Internet sites and information is best conducted when students have "real" projects to do. An evaluation lesson can become a natural extension to term papers or WebQuests (Dodge, 1995), which require students to use Web resources in addition to print resources. When the library media specialist and the academic teacher work together, the student will be assisted by both the subject specialist (the teacher who knows the content) and the information specialist (the library media specialist who knows how to find the information).

EJ 508 679

Doran, Kirk. The internet: Helping library patrons understand what the Internet is not. *Computers in Libraries*. June 1995, p. 22-24. Doran contends that it is effective to "contrast the reality of the Internet with perceptions that the patron already holds" to help library users understand when to turn to the Internet for information. Although he takes a negative stance ("The Internet is not fast."), the overall tone of the article is positive, and provides some good points for students to consider.

EJ 531 025

Schrock, Kathleen. It must be true: I found it on the Internet. *Technology Connection*. September 1996, p. 12-14. Schrock outlines a lesson plan for teaching critical evaluation of Web sites in the library media center. She starts by outlining the critical evaluation criteria and then edits a credible page into six different versions, some of which contain incorrect knowledge. The students work in groups to evaluate the printed copies of the site. The article includes a series of evaluation guides for each level of students.

EJ 538 037

Fitzgerald, Mary Ann. Misinformation on the Internet: Applying evaluation skills to online information. *Emergency Librarian*. January-February 1997, p. 9-14. Fitzgerald describes the premise of misinformation, and explains how one should evaluate Internet information. She outlines nine skills including those that can be used to teach the critical evaluation process. Several unique suggestions are included, such as allowing students to recognize that their own biases often cause ready acceptance when a site's premise agrees with their own. Learning more about content areas by offline

reading and browsing, before the online search process begins, is presented as a necessary skill.

ED 398 880

Barron, Ann and Carol Ivers. *An Internet research model*. June 1996. Barron and Ivers present a research model for incorporating relevant and meaningful Internet activities in the K-12 classroom. This article deals with the information-gathering process and the sorting, sifting, and evaluation of what is found. Based loosely on Eisenberg and Berkowitz's "Big Six" Model (Eisenberg, 1990), the basic and advanced research processes for online searching are succinctly outlined. The evaluation section explains that the student may need to repeat the cycle again if an adequate answer to their information problem is not found.

Conclusion

The amount of information available to students from all sources, both offline and online is increasing rapidly. Educators should teach students the processes involved in the critical evaluation of Web sites as they should teach critical evaluation of all information resources. Once students master skills for determining the accuracy, authority, and authenticity of Web resources, it is just as important that they take the process to the next level, and judge the applicability of the information found on the Web to the purpose at hand—their own information problem. This process could lead to a nation of information-savvy and information-literate consumers of this new resource.

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